

## Message Text

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USCINCSO QUARRY HTS CZ

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 1298

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, MORG, HO

SUBJECT: CONVERSATION WITH NATIONALIST PARTY LEADER RIECARDO ZUNIGA:  
PARTY POSITION ON CURRENT EVENTS

REF: TEGUCIGALPA 1245

BEGIN SUMMARY: IN CONVERSATION WITH POLOFF APRIL 3 NATIONALIST PARTY COORDINATOR RICARDO ZUNIGA SAID THAT HE REGARDS SEPARATION OF CHIEF OF STATE AND CHIEF OF ARMED FORCES RESPONSIBILITIES AS AN IMPROVEMENT AND BELIEVES THAT THIS MOVE CREATES THE FIRST REAL OPPORTUNITY FOR THE POLITICAL PARTIES TO PUSH FOR A RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT SINCE THE 1972 LOPEZ COUP. HE SEES NO IDEOLOGICAL SHIFT UPCOMING IN THE GOH AND FEELS THAT IF THE LT. COLONELS' GROUP IS COMPLETELY SUCCESSFUL IN IMPLEMENTING THE CHANGES ALREADY BEGUN THAT LOPEZ WILL BE COMPLETELY REMOVED WITHIN THREE MONTHS. ZUNIGA WOULD ALSO LIKE TO SEE THE USG USE ITS INFLUENCE TO ENCOURAGE A RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT. END SUMMARY.

1. IN CONVERSATION WITH POLOFF APRIL 3 RICARDO ZUNIGA A., COORDINATOR OF THE NATIONALIST PARTY, SAID THAT HE APPROVES OF THE RECENT CHANGES MADE WITHIN THE ARMED FORCES. HE BELIEVES THAT THOSE CHANGES HAVE CREATED THE BEST OPPORTUNITY SINCE  
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THE 1972 LOPEZ COUP FOR THE POLITICAL PARTIES TO PUSH FOR A

RETURN TO "NORMAL" POLITICAL PROCESS.

2. ZUNIGA SAID THAT HE IS CONVINCED THAT THE LT. COLONELS' MOTIVATION IS HONEST, I.E. THAT THEY HAVE MOVED IN ORDER TO IMPROVE THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE ARMED FORCES RATHER THAN BECAUSE OF PERSONAL AMBITION. HE BELIEVES, HOWEVER, THAT THE MEMBERS OF THE LT. COLONELS' GROUP WILL ALSO IN TIME BECOME CORRUPTED BY POWER AND IS UNEASY BECAUSE HE DOES NOT THINK THESE MEN FULLY UNDERSTAND THE NATURE OF THEIR NEW POWER OR HOW TO ADMINISTER AND LEAD A NATION. HE STATED THAT THREE LT. COLONELS WERE "LEFTIST" (NOT IDENTIFIED) BUT THAT THESE CONSTITUTED ONLY A SMALL MINORITY AND WERE NOT PARTICULARLY INFLUENTIAL. THESE CHANGES, HE SAID, DO NOT MEAN AN IDEOLOGICAL SHIFT IN THE GOH.

3. ZUNIGA, AFTER YEARS OF CLOSE ASSOCIATION WITH THE GENERAL, BELIEVES THAT LOPEZ HAS NOT REALLY ACCEPTED THESE CHANGES WHICH HAVE BEEN IMPOSED ON HIM. ZUNIGA THINKS THAT LOPEZ IS STILL SEARCHING FOR A WAY TO COMBINE FORCES TO REVERSE HIS CURRENT FORTUNES. HE ADDED THAT HE DOES NOT EXPECT LOPEZ TO RESORT TO ARMS AND THAT IF A SITUATION DEVELOPS WHEREBY AN ARMED CLASH IS LIKELY, THE GENERAL WILL RESIGN. HOWEVER, IF HE CAN COMBINE FORCES TO ALLOW THE REIMPOSITION OF HIS WILL, WITHOUT FIGHTING, HE WILL DO SO. ZUNIGA BELIEVES THAT THE LT. COLONELS HAVE PREPARED THEMSELVES WELL AND THAT LOPEZ'S RECOVERY OF HIS FORMER POWER IS NOT LIKELY. HE ADDED THAT THIS GROUP WILL BECOME SO AFFECTED BY THEIR NEW POWER THAT THEY WILL COMPLETELY DEPOSE LOPEZ WITHIN THREE MONTHS. IN HIS VIEW LOPEZ DOES NOT WANT TO RESIGN BECAUSE HE VERY MUCH ENJOYS THE PERQUISITES OF OFFICE.

4. TURNING TO MELGAR, ZUNIGA SAID THAT THE COLONEL ENJOYS CONSIDERABLE INFLUENCE. HE CONDITIONED THIS JUDGMENT BY SAYING THAT HE COMMANDS NO TROOPS AND THAT HE CANNOT EFFECTIVELY OPPOSE THE WILL OF THE LT. COLONELS. ZUNIGA BELIEVES THAT HE CAN HOLD HIS POSITION SO LONG AS HE DOES NOT ATTEMPT INDEPENDENT ACTION.

5. ZUNIGA SAID THAT THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEES OF THE NATIONALIST AND LIBERAL PARTIES HAD MET TO PREPARE A JOINT DECLARATION APPROVING THE RECENT CHANGES IN THE MILITARY AND CALLING FOR

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A RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT. HE SAID THAT HE REGARDS IT AS VERY UNLIKELY THAT THE LT. COLONELS WILL SOON CALL FOR ELECTIONS. THE NEW CIRCUMSTANCES, HOWEVER, CREATE NEW OPPORTUNITIES WHICH MUST BE ANALYSED BY THE POLITICAL PARTIES CAREFULLY TO DETERMINE THE MOST EFFECTIVE COURSE OF ACTION.

7. ZUNIGA CONCLUDED HIS REMARKS SAYING THAT HE VIEWED THE ROLE

OF THE US IN THE HEMISPHERE AS SUCH THAT IT WOULD BE IN THE  
USG'S INTEREST TO HAVE A RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT  
IN HONDURAS. HE SAID THAT THE MOST SUBTLE EXPRESSION OF  
USG INTEREST COULD HAVE THE MOST BENEFICIAL RESULTS. THE REPORTING  
OFFICER CLEARLY EXPRESSED TO ZUNIGA OUR POSITION OF ABSOLUTE  
NEUTRALITY IN THE EVENTS CURRENTLY IN MOTION AND REAFFIRMED THAT  
OUR INTEREST IS PURELY INFORMATIONAL IN NATURE.

8. TURNING TO THE CIVILIAN SIDE OF THE GOH, ZUNIGA BELIEVES  
THAT ALL CABINET MEMBERS, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF MINPUBHEALTH  
AGUILAR PAZ, WILL BE REPLACED. HE STATED THAT TO HIM THE  
MOST DANGEROUS ELEMENT IN THE CURRENT SITUATION IS THAT THE  
CABINET WILL BE REMOVED AS A CENTER OF POWER AND THAT LL  
POLICY WILL BE MADE IN THE SUPERIO DEFENCE COUNCIL. HE DOES  
NOT BELIEVE THAT THE LT COLONELS HAVE THE CAPACITY TO RUN  
THE CIVILIAN SIDE OF THE GOVERNMENT.  
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